

VZCZCXRO4266  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #0417/01 0481347  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 171347Z FEB 09 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1755  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000417

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2019

TAGS: PGOV KDEM PINR I2

SUBJECT: MUTHANNA: MANY PARTIES REPRESENTED IN NEW PROVINCIAL COUNCIL; ALLEGATIONS OF FRAUD CLOUD OUTCOME

REF: A. A) BAGHDAD 387  
    IB. B) BAGHDAD 314

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Muthanna reporting cable.

¶2. (C/REL MCFI) Summary: Perhaps as many as nine separate party lists will be represented on Muthanna's next Provincial Council (PC). While Da'wa and ISCI won an equal number of seats, Da'wa appears to have a stronger negotiating position for developing a governing coalition on the next PC. Between ten and 20 percent of the electorate could not vote because their names did not appear on the rolls. Notwithstanding voter registration problems, the parties indicate that they will largely accept the results. The PRT does not believe that there will be any substantial violence during the transition of power. End Summary.

MUTHANNA'S ELECTIONS: NO CLEAR WINNER

---

¶3. (SBU) As previously reported (Ref A), Prime Minister Maliki's (Da'wa-based) State of Law Coalition won a plurality of the vote in Baghdad, Basra, and most of the Shi'a south. In Muthanna this is the case as well, but at 10.9 percent of the vote -- the lowest winning total for Maliki's coalition in any of the nine provinces it won -- this result is far from a mandate. Other leading parties include the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, 9.3 percent), the Al Jumhoor bloc (headed by Governor Ahmed Marzook Salal Albu Hassan, 7.1 percent), the National Reform Trend (Former PM Jaafari's list, 6.3 percent), and the Free Independent List (Sadr-endorsed, 5.5 percent). These are preliminary results, however, that do not include the roughly 10,000 "special needs" votes cast on January 28, which may alter the final results that will be issued by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) in late February.

¶4. (C/REL) Multiple PRT contacts consulted since the release of the preliminary results have estimated that both the State of Law Coalition and ISCI will probably end up with five seats each, and the next two parties (Al Jumhoor and the National Reform Trend) will each receive three. The Sadr-endorsed list and four other smaller lists will receive two each, to round out the 26 total seats of the next provincial council. Notwithstanding the parity of seats between ISCI and the State of Law Coalition, Da'wa is in the stronger position due to the other Da'wa-leaning parties (e.g. National Reform List, Al Jumhoor) having won seats. Negotiations are under way to form a governing coalition.

¶5. (C/REL) Contacts of the PRT's local political adviser report that Governor Marzook is leading many of the ongoing negotiations to form a coalition. Da'wa, Jaafari, Al Jumhoor, and the Sadrists Free Independents will likely form the core of the coalition (13 seats). One or more small parties may also be included, perhaps the Gathering for Muthanna (the Al Zayadi tribe list, featuring the current

Director General of Health) and/or the Middle Euphrates Gathering (led by Sheikh Hakim Khazal Khashan).

¶16. (C/REL) The next governor may be chosen from outside the ranks of provincial council membership, according to sources, although PC member-elect Latif al-Hassani of ISCI (brother of slain former governor Muhammed Ali Hassan Abbas al-Hassani) is campaigning in earnest for the position. He argues that ISCI should be given the governor's seat in part because ISCI won the special needs voting, which would narrow the margin between ISCI and the Law State Coalition. The PRT does not believe his argument will net him the governor's chair, as Qbelieve his argument will net him the governor's chair, as this would be unacceptable to the Sadrists.

VOTING LIST PROBLEMS CLOUD THE RESULT

---

¶17. (C/REL) On many occasions, the PRT heard complaints about voters' list problems encountered during the election. On election day, PRT officers were stopped at a polling station outside of Samawah by a crowd of voters who said their names did not appear on the voting register. Subsequent discussion revealed that some had not confirmed that their names were on the voting lists during the August 2008 verification period, while others might have been at the wrong polling location. A few complained that they had verified last August, but that their names had disappeared by election day.

¶18. (C/REL) Subsequent discussions with local election officials revealed that this was a small but not insignificant problem. Majeed Majhool Dirweesh, an assistant director for the Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) in

BAGHDAD 00000417 002 OF 002

Samawah, told the PRT Team Leader a few days after the election that, while the GEO attempted to update voter lists, many voters were not able to vote. He estimated that as many as ten to 15 percent of voters -- perhaps as many as 30,000 -- did not cast ballots because of list problems. Sheikh Hakim, leader of the Middle Euphrates Gathering, told the PRT later that the voter list problem affected more voters, perhaps as many as 20 percent (40,000 voters). He complained bitterly, arguing that many voters who were on the list and voted in 2005 were excluded in 2009. The only explanation, he argued, was fraud or other manipulation. He has lodged a complaint with IHEC in Baghdad over the issue, but believes that it will go unheard.

¶19. (C/REL) Sheikh Hakim also suggested that religious parties bought votes and should have done much worse than the election results indicated. When the Senior Political Adviser noted that the religious parties did not fare well in the voting, Sheikh Hakim specifically singled out ISCI: "They should not have come in second here." He believes that PM Maliki's Da'wa Party is pleased with their overall results and can form coalitions easily in many provinces, and will therefore not disturb the results by investigating such complaints. Instead of pressing his complaint vigorously, Sheikh Hakim is angling to include his list's two seats as part of the governing coalition.

COMMENT

---

¶10. (C/REL) While the voter list problem is not unique to Muthanna (Ref B), it has brought a cloud on an otherwise transparent and fair election process. Local politicians such as Sheikh Hakim will complain about voter disenfranchisement, but would rather accept flaws in the system and have a "seat at the table," than lament its inadequacies from the outside. Locally, ISCI will likely be shut out of the final coalition because the Free Independents (the Sadr-endorsed party) will not accept their inclusion, and the Da'wa parties do not need them to form a reasonably stable coalition, anyway. Given the highly fractured

election outcome in Muthanna, where no party garnered more than 11 percent of the vote, this would be a real victory for the Prime Minister. End Comment.

BUTENIS